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INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE  
AMCONSUL LAHORE IMMEDIATE  
AMCONSUL KARACHI IMMEDIATE  
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NSC WASHINGTON DC  
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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
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AMCONSUL PESHAWAR

C O N F I D E N T I A L PESHAWAR 000183

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TAGS: PTER MOPS PGOV PK  
SUBJECT: AS KHYBER FIGHTING MOVES INTO PESHAWAR, FC LAUNCHES OPERATION

REF: A) PESHAWAR 179; B) PESHAWAR 176; C) 08 PESHAWAR 523

CLASSIFIED BY: Candace Putnam, Principal Officer, U.S. Consulate Peshawar. REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Two months of fighting in Khyber Agency, FATA, between two rival militias--Lashkar-i-Islam and Ansarul Islam--spilled over into the outskirts of Peshawar, culminating in bombings on August 22 and 23. The fighting has more to do with control over lucrative criminal activity than with ideology, but Pakistani government officials suggest that Mangal Bagh's Lashkar-i-Islam is using new tactics that may signal it has formed links with the TTP. A Frontier Corps operation against Lashkar-i-Islam in the Bara area of Khyber Agency is now underway. End summary.

¶2. (C) Twin bombings in Hayatabad on August 22 and in Momin Town on August 23 marked the first time that such bombs had been used effectively within the city of Peshawar in two months. The August 22 bomb, placed in a car which officials say was detonated remotely, killed Haji Mubin Afridi and a companion. Haji Mubin had been the spokesman of Ansarul Islam, a militant organization based in Khyber agency. The August 23 bombing, carried out by a man wearing a suicide vest, targeted the home of his family and killed three people and injured 15 when the bomber was forced to detonate himself prematurely. Both bombings were believed to be the work of rival militant organization Lashkar-i-Islam, whose leader Mangal Bagh is generally considered to be the most powerful criminal in Khyber.

#### Government Joins Sectarian Battle

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¶3. (C) The attacks were the most recent event in a round of internecine fighting between LI and AI beginning in early July, after LI had carried out targeted assassinations of two tribal figures in the Khyber city of Jamrud and the Tirah valley. LI and AI, which began operations in 2007 as the armed groups supporting two rival preachers based in the Tirah valley in western Khyber (both are now exiled), have repeatedly battled each other and other, clan-based, criminal organizations over control of turf in the agency. A particularly disputed prize has been the lawless Bara tehsil, where the Embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section reports that 4300 acres of poppy remain under cultivation.

¶4. (C) According to prominent Bara-based Afridi elder Malik Waris, clashes between LI and AI began on July 4, after the LI assassination of an anti-LI Afridi Kuki Khel clan elder and

retaliatory FC bombardment of FC positions in Tirah valley emboldened AI to begin acting aggressively in the Tirah. This touched off fighting between the two organizations that was intensified by the July 8 LI assassination of an AI-aligned Tirah valley clan elder. Fighting then spread to Bara and culminated in pitched battles between the two groups in both areas; reportedly over one hundred group members were killed in these clashes in July.

Peshawar Targeted

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¶ 15. (C) By late July, deployments of Frontier Corps and Frontier Constabulary began to respectively bombard suspected LI positions and arrest LI partisans in Bara and the western outskirts of Peshawar district - actions which NWFP Frontier Corps commander Major General Tariq Khan told PO had "crushed" the LI's combat power in Bara. Over the week of August 7-13, Peshawar was targeted almost every day by small-scale launches of rockets originating in Bara, to the west, and Matanni, to the south; rocket attacks on the city have continued infrequently since then (ref A). LI-AI fighting has also continued sporadically in the Tirah valley, but not in Bara.

LI-TTP Alliance?

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¶ 16. (C) NWFP Chief Minister Hoti told PO that the August 23 bombing marks the first time that the LI has employed a suicide bomber. Whatever the origins and pretensions of the group might be, it has always been more criminal than ideological and has never inspired the level of commitment in its adherents necessary to recruit suicide bombers. The fact that they were now able to employ this tactic with success, he said, suggests at least a tactical alliance between LI and TTP, which has been deploying suicide bombers with effect for over two years.

¶ 17. (C) In late 2008 and early 2009, the two organizations fought each other as the TTP under Hakimullah Mehsud tried to expand its area of operations to target NATO supplies transiting the agency before a Frontier Corps-supported operation largely drove TTP back into neighboring Orakzai agency. According to two Consulate contacts who work as journalists in Khyber, however, there have been rumors over the past few months of growing links between the two organizations, as TTP has contracted LI to carry out attacks and kidnappings in Khyber and Peshawar on its behalf. In particular, the journalists say a mid-July resumption of attacks on tankers carrying NATO fuel bears all of the hallmarks of LI but represents a target set previously avoided by the organization, which has previously considered tolls from the transiting trucks to be a good revenue source. On August 27, the TTP claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing of a khassadar post at the Torkham border crossing, which killed 22.

FC Operation Planned

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¶ 18. (C) The tit-for-tat actions between the FC and LI in Bara and Peshawar appear to be only a prelude for a larger FC operation to clear out the militant group's stronghold in the Tirah valley (between Khyber and Orakzai Agencies). NWFP FC commander Major General Tariq Khan told PO on August 25 that he would launch an operation into this area in a few weeks - as soon as he finished with his planned operation into the Mamood tehsil of Bajaur, using troops now being withdrawn from Buner, where the FC has concluded operations. He claimed that the operation in Tirah would take only a week. Habibullah told PO September 2 that a Frontier Corps operation focused on Bara had been underway since the previous afternoon, with airstrikes on the Tirah as a follow-on; a full ground operation into the Tirah would have to wait.

¶ 19. (C) Comment: The NWFP government had generally adopted a posture of toleration toward LI's continued presence in the

area because it considered the group to be a relatively nonthreatening (and anti-TTP) militant organization (ref C). When LI moved its operations into Peshawar, however, the government was forced to act against an increasingly serious deterioration of law and order. An LI alliance with Hakimullah Mehsud would be particularly dangerous; an increased operational profile in the Khyber-Peshawar area would be an attractive way for Hakimullah to assert his primacy in the TTP (ref B).

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